READERS DIGEST
JULY 1970

P-Friggens, Paul
Orgl Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Orig unclr Friggens

The World's Most Versatile Police

By Paul Friggens

• At Montreal International Airport, one day in February 1964, a crack drug squad of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police secretly observed the arrival of Uruguayan diplomat Juan Carlo Arizti. Tailing Arizti downtown to Montreal's Central Station, the detectives watched as he stored four pieces of luggage in two lockers. Later, searching the lockers, they verified their suspicions: the luggage, which had cleared Canadian Customs under diplomatic immunity, contained a huge shipment of heroin—enough to supply 60,000 addicts for three months.

The next night, the detectives took all but a few pounds of the heroin from the suitcases, replacing the plastic bags of white powder with similar-looking bags of flour. Then, hoping to trap others in the smuggling ring, they let the suspect pick up his luggage and proceed to New York—under the surveillance of both RCMP and U.S. narcotics agents. "We left some heroin, in order to make a case in the United States," an RCMP officer explained later.

A few hours after the confident Arizti arrived at New York's Pennsylvania Station, he and his accomplices—the Mexican ambassador to Bolivia, Salvador Pardo-Bolland, and René Bruchon, one of the biggest French traffickers in the business—were arrested. Thus the books were closed on one of the biggest heroin seizures in history: 138 pounds of nearly pure stuff, worth more than $52 million.

• At about 12:15 p.m. on June 1, 1968, after examining nearly a quarter-million passport applications, an alert RCMP team in Ottawa pounced on the photograph of one Ramon George Sneyd. The photo bore a marked resemblance to James Earl Ray, alias Eric Starvo Galt, who was wanted for the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. When subsequent investigation revealed that Sneyd had left for England, photographs and fingerprints were rushed to London. Booked on a flight to Brussels, Sneyd/Ray was captured at London's Heathrow Airport just as his plane was about to take off.

By putting the finger on Ray, the RCMP had helped solve one of the most sensational murders of all time.

"The Silent Force." Officially organized as the North-West Mounted Police in 1873 to keep the peace on Canada's western frontier, the RCMP today patrols the biggest beat on earth: 3,852,000 square miles that span seven time zones—a vast domain reaching from the great urban centers of eastern Canada to the ice-locked lands and waters rimming the North Pole. "The Force," as it is always called by its prideful members, performs more functions than any other police unit in the world. Its mission today includes most of the duties which in the United States are normally handled by the FBI, the Secret Service, the counterespionage wing of the CIA, the Border Patrol and, in many areas, state and municipal police.

Most RCMP members discount the Nelson Eddy-"Rose Marie" image of the organization, and the myth that the scarlet-jacketed Mounties "always get their man." (In fact, the scarlet tunics are now worn only on special occasions, and the "Mounties" use horses only for their ceremonial "Musical Ride," which performs at fairs and exhibitions.) Still, even though they have shunned publicity to the extent that they have earned the title of "The Silent Force," the romantic Hollywood legend lives on. Every year, RCMP headquarters is deluged with letters from all over the world containing requests for everything from photos of Mounties to proposals of marriage. The RCMP replies with a modest booklet which says, "Police work is 24 hours a day, often complicated, difficult, sometimes monotonous, and there is very little evidence of the glamour attributed to the Force."

about its Ottawa headquarters—a steel-fenced, gray-stone building originally intended as a seminary—or about the present commissioner, graying, magnetic William Leonard Higgitt. A tough, 53-year-old lawman who worked his way up through the ranks, Higgitt rarely talks publicly about the RCMP. But he runs his 11,250-man organization with the kind of quiet devotion to duty that has filled history books with stories of heroic RCMP feats.

"Outgunned But Not Outfought." As long as men honor courage, they will talk of Constable H. M. C. Johnstone. At 10:30 a.m. on April 3, 1956, the piercing whine of a bank alarm sounded in Vancouver's Burnaby Detachment of the RCMP. Immediately, a terse message flashed over the police radio: "Burnaby to all cars and stations . . . A bank alarm . . . The Royal Bank of Canada . . . Lougheed Highway and North Road."

Two young constables, Johnstone and A. L. Beach, were first on the scene. Johnstone leaped from the patrol car and entered the bank, while Beach parked. Inside, the situation appeared normal. "Everything okay?" Johnstone asked the bank manager. The frightened man nodded; hidden behind the counter, a masked bandit held a sawed-off shotgun at his back. Suddenly, one of two other bandits fired a .38-caliber slug point-blank at Johnstone. Falling to the floor, Johnstone was riddled with seven more shots. Nonetheless, he fired back with deadly accuracy, hitting one bandit in the shoulder and knocking the gun out of his hand. Staggering to his feet, the crippled constable blazed away at the first bandit as he ran from the bank with $10,000 clutched under his arm. Outside, both Johnstone and Beach continued firing.

When the smoke had cleared, one bank robber was found shot cleanly through the heart. Another had surrendered meekly to Johnstone, who was sitting on the sidewalk covering a third bandit with his now empty gun. "Outgunned but not outfought," a news report read. Johnstone was awarded the coveted George Medal "for great bravery" by the Queen.

"The Lost Patrol." Probably the strangest case in RCMP crime-detection history occurred a few years

Continued